

22/12/21

The Hon Michael Sukkar MP  
Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer  
The Treasury  
Langton Crescent  
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Re: 2022-2023 Pre-Budget Submission

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) welcomes the opportunity to provide this pre-budget submission. Responding to the needs of young people is central to a strong economic and social recovery in the post COVID-19 environment. We urge the government to ensure that the 2022-23 budget has a priority focus on Australia's young people - in particular, those facing structural barriers to economic and social participation, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who make up almost half of Australia's youth population.

Throughout 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the lives everyone in the Australian community in acute ways. Young people continued to be impacted by upheavals in their education, training and employment pathways and disruption to social connections, and COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing disadvantage faced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds across all aspects of their lives. In this submission we call on the government to commit funds in the following key areas:

- Youth employment and income support
- Youth mental health
- Education
- Social cohesion

We have also included proposals for two projects:

- (i) MYAN CALD Youth Mental Health Traineeship pilot
- (ii) Strengthening state and territory responses to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

### **About MYAN**

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people aged 12-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Our vision is that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are supported, valued and thriving in Australia.

MYAN works in partnership with young people, government, and non-government agencies at the state and territory and national levels to ensure the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised in policy and service delivery.

MYAN provides expert policy advice to government, undertakes a range of sector development activities, and supports young people to develop leadership and advocacy skills. We have developed the National Youth

Settlement Framework which is the first and only framework to guide and measure integration and settlement support for young people, providing an evidence-based approach to good practice. It is designed to build the capacity of government and non-government sectors, enabling them to better respond to the needs of young people in the settlement and integration context. Since its release in 2016, MYAN has worked with a range of government and non-government stakeholders to support the implementation of the Framework in policy and service delivery through a range of sector capability building activities.

We know that young people are keen to participate in decision-making processes and opportunities to explore diverse responses to the issues that affect them. MYAN affirms the importance of recognising and building on young people's strengths and capabilities, and working with them as partners in service planning and delivery.

### **About this submission**

This submission has a focus on young people (aged 12-24) from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This group of young people make up almost half (47%) of Australia's youth population.<sup>1</sup> A significant proportion of new arrivals into Australia each year via the migration program are also aged between 15 and 29 years. In 2019, this group accounted for 50% of all migrant arrivals. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a diverse group, due to country of origin, cultural background, migration experience and stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures, age and developmental life stage, and workforce experience.

We call on the Federal Government to ensure the 2022-23 budget includes an intentional, and central focus on the experiences, concerns, and hopes of young people, in recognition of the key role they play in the imagining of Australia's future, and their vital role in current economic recovery and social cohesion.

Further, we encourage the government to address longstanding inequalities and disadvantage for particular groups of young people to ensure that all of Australia's young people can access opportunities for future social, economic and civic participation.

**Targeted investment in young people is critical for Australia's prosperity. Against a backdrop of unprecedented social and economic upheaval, this is a crucial time to work with young people to install a vision of a future that they feel hopeful and confident in.**

This submission provides recommendations for targeted socio-economic responses and culturally specific early interventions to increase education and employment opportunities, participation in, and access to youth mental health support and encourage the government to adequately account for pre-existing barriers and disadvantages in these responses.

MYAN is calling for a Budget that:

- a) Is responsive to the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on young people, including those from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- b) Is responsive to the needs of young people who are at higher risk of exclusion and disadvantage due to economic, social, and civic barriers, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- c) Recognises the key role that young people have in the re-establishment of Australia's economic well-being and long-term stability.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) <https://www.abs.gov.au>

## Budget 2021-22 recommendations

### 1. Employment

**The national unemployment rates for those aged 15 to 24 years are consistently double that of the average national rate for 15 to 64-year-olds<sup>2</sup>** As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to evolve in 2021 measures to respond such as lockdowns, border closures and loss of stable employment continued to impact young people who were already disproportionately engaged in low-skilled and insecure employment prior to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

**The long-term impact on youth employment is likely to be severe given that young people aged 15-24 in Australia are already three times more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than adults aged 25 and over<sup>4</sup>,** representing a significant underutilisation of this group. Further, the Labour Force Survey has consistently shown a disparity in the youth participation rate between young people born overseas and those born in Australia. Over the last 20 years, the gap between these two groups has been as large as 17%.<sup>5</sup>

We know from our work that the intersection of being both young and also more newly arrived from a refugee or migrant background means that this group of young people face additional barriers and challenges to meaningful employment than their Australian-born, non-migrant peers - leaving them particularly vulnerable to long term labour market exclusion.

Barriers can include:

- Lack of social/professional networks
- No/limited local work experience
- Lack of recognition of qualifications obtained overseas
- Lack of experience and knowledge in how to apply for jobs
- experiences of racism and discrimination/unconscious bias,
- Digital literacy/access
- English language proficiency
- Minimal or disrupted schooling as a result of their migration journey
- Reluctance of employers to hire newly arrived young people.
- Unfamiliarity with Australian workplace laws and greater risk of workplace exploitation.

Significant and prolonged youth unemployment and underemployment is not only bad for the economy; it has damaging flow-on effects such as mental ill health and homelessness. Being unemployed, underemployed or Not in Education or Training (NEET) affects the ability of young people to plan for their future, and engage in civic life fully. It is likely to result in poor living conditions (in terms of housing, nutrition, and physical safety), isolation from the community and barriers to accessing health care and social services, and negative impacts on emotional and psychological well-being.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2021) Engagement in education or employment Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/engagement-in-education-or-employment>

<sup>3</sup> BSL (2020) [Youth Employment Monitor 2020](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12338/1/BSL_COVID_the_great_disruptor_youth_unemployment_Dec2020.pdf) Available at: [http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12338/1/BSL\\_COVID\\_the\\_great\\_disruptor\\_youth\\_unemployment\\_Dec2020.pdf](http://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12338/1/BSL_COVID_the_great_disruptor_youth_unemployment_Dec2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government (2018) The next generation of employment services discussion paper, Appendix G – Labour market data and information. Available at: <https://docs.employment.gov.au/documents/next-generation-employment-services-discussion-paper>

<sup>5</sup> Deloitte Access Economic (2021) Covid-19 and Young Migrants-Impacts and Solutions Available at: <https://myan.org.au/reports-publications/accessreport/>

<sup>6</sup> MYAN (2020) [COVID-19 & Young People from Refugee & Migrant Backgrounds](https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf) Available at: <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf>

Further, the lack of job availability or the lack of secure work for young people delays the typical milestones of adulthood, and potential to become independent, including the need to delay moving out of home, taking on more debt than previous generations by staying in school longer, and being less likely to secure home loans than previous generations.

Investment in supports and services that addresses the employment barriers faced by young people from migrant backgrounds, and facilitates their economic participation has positive implications for their meaningful and long-term participation in the labour market, for their own settlement experiences and futures and for the Australian community and economy more broadly.

Maintaining Australia's economic recovery and long-term economic sustainability requires strategic economic investment to support positive, long-term employment outcomes for young people, and addressing the long-term causes of youth under and unemployment.

The 2022-23 budget presents a key opportunity to support young people-particularly vulnerable young people negotiating systemic employment barriers and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds-to overcome the impacts of COVID-19 and navigate current and future job markets. This will in turn contribute to a stronger economic recovery, and yield economic benefits for Australia as a whole. For example, by modelling parity in labour force participation Australia's pre-eminent economics advisory practice Deloitte Access Economic, were able to predict that **policies that successfully create parity of labour force participation between young migrants and the Australian born population could increase the size of the Australian economy by \$44 billion from 20-23 to 2032 and create 54,000 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs.**<sup>7</sup>

Targeted support for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds is the most effective way for this group of young people to access and remain engaged in employment.

#### Recommendations:

1. Fund a National Youth Employment Strategy that provides meaningful and secure work for all young people. This should include:

-Committing to a youth jobs guarantee with industry, government, and community to ensure that all young people have access to meaningful and secure work.

-Creating targeted strategies and wraparound supports for young people who face additional barriers to employment, including young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

-Providing localised pro-youth economic stimulus to regions and industries most affected by the pandemic, especially in the university, arts, hospitality, tourism, community, and childcare sectors.

2. Invest in collaboration and co-design with young people to develop innovative new approaches that meet their needs in the modern labour market.

3. Review and improve current employment services with a focus on outcomes related to sustained employment rather than job placement.

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<sup>7</sup> Deloitte Access Economic (2021) Covid-19 and Young Migrants-Impacts and Solutions Available at: <https://myan.org.au/reports-publications/accessreport/>

4. Continue to invest in Active Labour Market Programs that demonstrate positive outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and ensure that investment in (generalist) youth employment programs include targeted approaches and specialist services for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
5. Invest in community-based employment programs to include a mentoring component to help young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds build employability skills, gain work experience, and connect with employment opportunities.
6. Invest in wage subsidy programs that incentivise businesses to employ those who face disadvantage in the job market – including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
7. Explore opportunities to fund paid 6-12 month internships for more marginalised young people, including those who are not engaged in education or training (NEET) in a variety of industries, to prepare them for job-readiness in the absence of jobs – including a targeted focus on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
8. Increase JobSeeker to ensure payments respect young people’s dignity, wellbeing, and autonomy while they are looking for work.

## 2. Mental health

MYAN welcomed the inclusion in the 2020 Federal Budget of Youth mental health – \$45.7 million to expand a program that helps young people with a mental illness participate in the workforce, \$7 million to Beyond Blue, Lifeline and Kids Helpline to meet increased demand for crisis support and \$5 million to Headspace to increase outreach services to young people. However, we recommend that further investment in youth mental health is needed to address systemic issues around access and service provision is required.

**Adolescence is the peak time of onset for many mental health disorders<sup>8</sup>.** Though half of all mental illnesses appear before the age of 14 and three-quarters by the age of 25, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the mental health of young people across Australia, young people in Australia still face barriers to appropriate mental health care, including considerable gaps in services, costs, long waits and often a lack of continuity of care.<sup>9</sup>

**Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face additional mental health risks to the general youth population, as well as structural barriers to accessing the support they need.** For example, traumatic migration experiences, racism and discrimination, the stress and uncertainty of seeking asylum, and the resettlement process can contribute to poorer mental health, and experiences of trauma will shape the type of care young people need and how it is delivered. Multicultural young people, families and communities may also hold understandings of mental health, illness, and recovery that are shaped by cultural and religious views which may differ to clinical approaches used in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Orygen (2018) Youth mental health service models and approaches Considerations for primary care. Available at: <https://www.orygen.org.au/About/Service-Development/Youth-Enhanced-Services-National-Programs/Primary-Health-Network-resources/Youth-mental-health-service-models-and-approaches/Youth-mental-health-service-models-and-approaches?ext=>

<sup>9</sup> Mental Health Victoria (2021) 2021 Federal Budget Submission.

<sup>10</sup> CMY & Orygen (2020) Responding together multicultural young people and their mental health. Available at: <https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Population-groups/Responding-together/Policy-report.aspx?ext=>.

Although there is minimal research on the mental health of young people from refugee backgrounds, literature suggests higher rates of psychiatric disorders amongst this group compared with the adult population, and highlights that they also face a high risk of suicide.<sup>11</sup> The *Building a New Life in Australia* study revealed that young people from humanitarian backgrounds have much higher levels of psychological stress – 31% of young men and 37% of young women – than the general youth population in Australia<sup>12</sup>.

Despite this, there are lower than expected numbers of young people from refugee backgrounds presenting to mental health services. In the context of Australia, children and young people generally have relatively low levels of service usage (despite high levels of mental health issues), while refugee children and young people have even lower rates of utilisation of mental health services compared with young people more broadly.<sup>13</sup>

There is wide consensus that early, specialist intervention can reduce the severity and duration of young people's mental ill-health<sup>14</sup> yet despite this, many young people and their families still lack access to appropriate specialist mental health services.

Providing early, targeted, accessible, and youth-focused mental health services may circumvent the short term detrimental effects of mental health disorders, and safeguard young people from longer term, ongoing cycles of dysfunction and disadvantage that may result when mental health disorders remain untreated into adulthood.<sup>15</sup> The short and long term consequences of untreated mental illness include impaired social functioning, poor educational achievement, substance abuse, self-harm, suicide and violence.<sup>16</sup> It also has an crushing economic impact-for example, 2018 estimates indicated that workplace disengagement due to mental health issues cost the Australian economy \$12 billion annually.<sup>17</sup>

Almost half (46%) of Australia's young people are first or second-generation migrants- cultural diversity must be regarded as an integral component of mental health practice as a whole, rather than as an adjunct to service delivery. There is an urgent need to ensure that mental health programs are designed and funded in response to the cultural, social and health disparities experienced by refugee and migrant communities (including health and mental health literacy). This should occur in collaboration with trusted (multicultural youth) services with expertise and networks with this youth cohort.

## Recommendations:

<sup>11</sup> CMY (2019) Submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health. Available at: [https://www.pc.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/241175/sub446-mental-health.pdf](https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/241175/sub446-mental-health.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Commissioner for Children and Young People- Western Australia, (2013). The mental health and wellbeing of children and young people: Children and Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Policy brief.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Correll CU, Galling B, Pawar A. 2018. Comparison of Early Intervention services vs Treatment as Usual for Early-Phase Psychosis – A Systematic Review, Meta-analysis, and Meta-regression, JAMA Psychiatry 75(6):555-565.

<sup>15</sup> Mission Australia (2016) Youth mental health report Youth Survey 2012-16. Available at: [http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2017-youth-mental-health-report\\_mission-australia-and-black-dog-institute.pdf?sfvrsn=6](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2017-youth-mental-health-report_mission-australia-and-black-dog-institute.pdf?sfvrsn=6).

<sup>16</sup> McGorry.P & Goldstone.S (2011) Is this normal? Assessing mental health in young people. Available at: <https://www.racgp.org.au/getattachment/584cac98-afb8-4f0c-88a5-f0d8526d1542/Is-this-normal.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> Roxburgh, Nina (2018) Youth mental health and the impact on Australia's economy. Available at: <https://nycinquiry.org.au/youth-mental-health/>

1. Expand and develop youth specialist mental health services, including multicultural youth services.
2. Implementing mental health literacy strategies with communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds to reduce stigma and build understanding of available youth mental health supports.
3. Implementing culturally responsive approaches in assessment and service delivery and mandated cultural awareness training for all staff working in mental health with young people
4. Funding for professional phone interpreters for mental health sessions with young people who have English as an Additional Language.
5. Increased funding for tele-health or tele-psychiatry for young people in rural and remote areas that have limited access to onsite mental health specialists
6. Investment in long-term research around the efficacy of mental health policies and mainstream youth mental health in meeting the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, specifically identifying the factors that help or hinder their use.

## 2.2 MYAN CALD Youth Mental Health Traineeship pilot-proposal

In 2021 MYAN worked to develop a proposal for a CALD youth mental health traineeship pilot. This is a unique and innovative, response to some of the most important current and future challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This initiative would seek to address some of the issues highlighted in this submission, namely the underrepresentation of young people from CALD backgrounds accessing youth mental health services and barriers to economic participation. It would do this by:

- (i) Responding to the existing workforce gap in the youth mental health sector of staff trained in CALD responsive support.
- (ii) Addressing the current workforce gap in youth mental health services by creating entry-level jobs.
- (iii) Addressing the urgent need for more targeted approaches in training and employment pathways to facilitate CALD youth labor market participation.

This proposed initiative intentionally builds on recent Government investment - traineeships/apprenticeships (skills package and subsidies) and youth mental health - and existing infrastructure and expertise in the VET sector, in Government and the non-government sector. We have been working with Orgyen, National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health, in the development of the initiative.

## Funding

We are seeking \$5 million over 3 years for this national Pilot initiative to support (i) initial research and scoping to identify good practice in youth mental health and the VET sector and globally (n.b. – through our links with industry and Orygen, we have already identified similar programs in New Zealand, the UK and South Africa that warrant further investigation), (ii) development of a model of delivery, (iv) piloting in 5 states (including regional and rural areas) and (v) evaluation.

### 3. Education

**Supporting the transition of young people from education into work is critical to addressing employment barriers.**

The availability of, and equitable access to, high quality education and training, including vocational education and training (VET) is essential in preparing young people for entry into a competitive labour market. Schools are able to provide young people with crucial job-related skills and information, which support the capacity of young people to become autonomous and confident individuals, and active and informed participants in Australian society.

Education correlates with crucial post-school opportunities and the transition to higher education, training, and employment, and is a significant development milestone and pathway to economic and social participation for all young people and a key priority in the settlement journey for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.<sup>18</sup>

**Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are commonly highly motivated to learn, but many face specific challenges in navigating and engaging in education pathways.** These include limited or no proficiency in English, age on arrival to Australia, literacy in their first language, highly disrupted/minimal/no previous formal education, limited practical support for learning at home due to limited English and digital literacy of family, and a limited understanding of and familiarity with Australian education and training systems and pathways.<sup>19</sup>

**Many young people do not fare well in the current labour market and find themselves trapped in insecure 'survival' jobs that do not utilise their skills, qualifications or abilities.**<sup>20</sup> This despite improving educational attainment, with nearly 60% of young people holding a post school qualification. We know that young people are able to navigate these challenges more successfully when there is adequate and targeted support and investment in addressing structural barriers – including the engagement of multicultural workers in schools, and adequate access to English as an Additional Language (EAL) support.

**A lack of adequate support that is responsive to the learning needs of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds and/or significant disruptions to their education as we saw during the height of COVID-19 means they are at increased risk of disengagement or withdrawal from education and training.** Disengagement from school, and early school leaving, has significant consequences for a young person's future social, economic, and civic participation and well-being, and settlement outcomes and social cohesion more broadly. These include lower economic growth, higher costs of public related services including health care and employment services support and increased welfare (income support) costs.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> MYAN & Foundation House (2020) National Education Roundtable: Education & students from Refugee & Migrant Backgrounds Available at: [https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/education\\_issue\\_05.pdf](https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/education_issue_05.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> MYAN (2020) COVID-19 & Young People from Refugee & Migrant Backgrounds Available at: <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Burhani. N & Sayed. J (2017) Facilitating better employment opportunities for refugee background migrants and people seeking asylum in Australia: a policy briefing paper Available at: [https://socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/2759687/Facilitating-better-employment-opportunities-for-refugee-background-migrants-and-people-seeking-asylum-in-Australia.pdf](https://socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2759687/Facilitating-better-employment-opportunities-for-refugee-background-migrants-and-people-seeking-asylum-in-Australia.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



Conversely, investment in targeted educational strategies and supports that are responsive to the unique barriers faced by young students from refugee and migrant backgrounds means that young people are better equipped to navigate these challenges more successfully. Investment into the provision of education to students from refugee and migrant backgrounds must ensure that their participation in the Australia education system is inclusive and contributes to equitable educational outcomes and opportunities comparable with that of their Australian born, non-immigrant peers.

In the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, schools across Australia are back in the classroom, and this provides a **unique opportunity to conduct further research** into the lived experiences of students, school leaders, teachers, families, policymakers, education organisations and educational technology companies to determine what worked and what did not throughout this period. This is an opportunity to identify what educational practices were most successful in distance learning for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families, and what practices and innovations students and teachers would like to see incorporated into “normal” schooling.

#### Recommendations:

1. Ensure that young people are accessing the EAL/S support they need to build their English Language skills, including:
  - a) Directing funding allocations for English language learning in schools.
  - b) Increasing funding transparency, accountability, and utilisation for schools with an EAL/D cohort.
  - c) Developing nationally consistent definitions, measurements and cost structures that (re)direct EAL funding to the education needs of students who need it most.
2. Invest in career advisory programs within the school sector that emphasise VET, apprenticeships and alternative post-school pathways to the same extent as higher education.
3. Invest in research into good practice educational approaches and outcomes during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Addressing the digital divide

Digital inclusion for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds supports independence and social connectedness and improves access to education, employment, health and wellbeing information, government and financial services.<sup>22,23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Settlement Council of Australia (2020) Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees. Available at: <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Supporting-the-digital-inclusion-of-new-migrants-and-refugees.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> CMY (2017) Settlement in the digital age. Available at: <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/settlement-in-the-digital-age/>

However, there is a ‘digital divide’ between newly arrived migrants and refugees and mainstream Australia, in both access to and use of digital technology.<sup>24</sup> COVID-19 starkly highlighted the digital divide, particularly for students and teachers, and put students at significant risk of learning loss.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout 2020 it was highlighted that—despite hardship policies in place in all state schools to support families with the purchase of devices and technology for learning—there is a significant ‘digital divide’ with many students not having adequate or appropriate access to technology devices and data packages to support learning. Furthermore, digital literacy was highlighted during 2020 as impacting the education experiences of students and families of refugee backgrounds.

IT and data issues highlighted by the ongoing Covid-crisis include:

- The lack of appropriate devices and data in many families.
- The lack of devices as families often shared a single device, but have several family members with learning/technology/data needs.
- Delays in supply of internet dongles as well as postage delays in getting devices/SIMS/dongles to students in some states.
- Unfamiliarity of parents using devices, apps, and programs used by schools.
- Assumptions that all young people are digitally connected and thus able to engage with on-line education.

Additionally, language barriers or low English proficiency are significant barriers to digital inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees. Moreover, newly arrived migrants and refugees need to have digital capabilities to access further education opportunities with the increasing trend of education and skills training being provided in a digital format. Those in rural/regional areas are especially challenged with data and connectivity barriers, which must be improved for regional settlement to be successful.

#### Recommendations

1. Resource the promotion of digital inclusion at familiar contact points for refugees and migrants, e.g. AMEP program, settlement services, community centres or other contact points.
2. Include appropriate digital technology in the Basic Household Goods Package, provided as part of the Humanitarian Settlement Program – such as laptops and a phone for more than one family member, with an appropriate data allowance for a period of time.
3. Embed in-language digital mentoring in settlement services.
4. Invest in ICT infrastructure in regional areas.

#### 4. Social cohesion

The feeling of belonging to a community is a crucial element in the success of our multicultural society and social cohesion more broadly, however **racism works against Australia’s goal of building a fair and inclusive society.**

<sup>24</sup> Settlement Council of Australia (2020) Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees. Available at: <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Supporting-the-digital-inclusion-of-new-migrants-and-refugees.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> MYAN and Foundation House (2020) Education and students of migrant and refugee backgrounds. Available at: <https://myan.org.au/reports-publications/national-education-briefing-paper/>

**Racism and discrimination exists despite the diversity of the Australian community.** Racism and discrimination are an ever-present reality for many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and more investment is needed to support efforts to combat racism and discrimination in Australia in all its forms.

A first-of-its-kind study of racism in Australian schools has found that Australian students are facing “confronting levels of racism” with **one in three students report being the victim of racial discrimination by their peers.**<sup>26</sup> The Scanlon Foundation recently released the *2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Report*, a report that provides vital insight into contemporary social cohesion and population issues in Australia. One significant change in the survey was a major increase in people’s perception of how big a problem racism is. **The report shows a dramatic 20% increase in people who believe that racism in Australia is a very big or big problem**-from 40% in 2020 to 60% in 2021.<sup>27</sup>

This is seriously concerning. The Scanlon report states that “An increase of 20 percentage points in response to a general question of this nature is almost unprecedented in the Scanlon Foundation surveys.” These findings highlight the systemic racism and discrimination that is still prevalent in Australia with far-reaching implications for all Australians. This is particularly the case for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. We know that racism:

- \* threatens the personal and cultural identity of young people
- \* damages social cohesion
- \* causes economic exclusion
- \* causes detrimental impacts on mental health and wellbeing such as anxiety, depression, stress and poor quality of life
- \* undermines young people’s ability to develop a strong sense of belonging<sup>28</sup>
- \* is a key barrier to social inclusion, which diminishes a young person’s sense of connection and belonging
- \* contributes to marginalisation and isolation
- \* diminishes participation in education, employment, and recreational activities
- \* contributes to feelings of anger, depression, heightened fear, and flashbacks to trauma experienced prior to arriving in Australia.<sup>29</sup>

**Multiple studies across Australia report a relationship between racism and health and wellbeing outcomes,** and the American Academy of Paediatrics has called racism a “core social determinant of health” and “a driver of health inequities”.<sup>41</sup> It also adds unnecessary costs to the Australian workplace and economy- one recent study

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<sup>26</sup> Priest, N., Chong, S., Truong, M., Sharif, M., Dunn, K., Paradies, Y., Nelson, J., Alam, O., Ward, A. and Kavanagh, A., (2019) Findings from the 2017 Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) student and staff surveys. *No. 3/2019*.

<sup>27</sup> Markus, A. (2021) Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2021. Available at: <https://scanlonfoundation.org.au/2021-mapping-social-cohesion-report/>

<sup>28</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Anti-Racism Strategy and Racism. It Stops With Me Campaign*.

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/projects/national-anti-racism-strategy-and-racism-it-stops-me-campaign>

<sup>29</sup> MYAN (2020) COVID-19 & Young People from Refugee & Migrant Backgrounds Available at: <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf>

revealed that the annual cost of racism results in more than 3% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product, adding unnecessary costs to the Australian workplace and economy.<sup>30</sup>

Australia is one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world, and cultural diversity has become one of this country's most defining contemporary characteristics. The investment that Australia makes in strong settlement services and recognition of cultural diversity is vital for creating the conditions for a productive society and a stronger sense of safety for everyone living in Australia. But a safe and welcoming community is also critical for positive settlement and integration outcomes. Public perception of migrants can influence the settlement experience and affects the cohesion of the Australian community.

Social cohesion asserts that greater benefits, satisfaction, and security are achieved when community or society 'sticks together', and welcomes diversity, rather than focusing on differences. Therefore, investment in social cohesion must include a focus on preventing racism.

Effectively addressing racism and discrimination requires ongoing investment in:

- Responses that strengthen and promote community participation and engagement.
- Laws that condemn and actively discourage racism and discrimination of all kinds.
- Leadership that actively promotes inclusion and condemns racism and discrimination.
- Measures that address structural and systemic barriers to access and participation.

#### Recommendations:

1. Fund and endorse a national anti-racism framework

2. Invest in innovative strategies to combat racism and build social cohesion, including:

-an online campaign led by young people and coordinated by MYAN.

-local level, community building activities utilising sports and arts

3. Invest in initiatives that facilitate opportunities for young people to have their voices heard in political and civic domains to inform policy and decision making.

#### **6. Strengthening state and territory responses to support young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds-proposal.**

As this submission highlights, young people, including those from refugee and migrant backgrounds, are facing enormous challenges in a post COVID-19 world. Responding to the needs of young people, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds will be central to strong social and economic recovery post COVID-19. This requires a nationally consistent approach, one which supports young people to navigate and respond to existing

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30 MYAN (2021) Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security's Inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism in Australia.

barriers and the multiple challenges as a result of COVID-19, and which ensures they have a say in the decisions and responses that will affect their futures.

One way to ensure this is to strengthen existing organisations who are working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at the local level. Since its inception in 2013, MYAN has built a multicultural youth national voice and sector by supporting the development of multicultural youth specialist entities and organisations in each of Australia's states and territories. An injection of funding from the Commonwealth into these existing structures will strengthen the capacity of these organisations to provide targeted, localised support to the young people they work with, provide expert policy advice to government, and ensure a nationally consistent and targeted approach to improve young people's long-term social, civic and economic participation.

As the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, MYAN state/territory model provides expert policy advice, sector capacity building activities (including COP mechanisms to facilitate partnerships across the service delivery system/with mainstream services), youth leadership and mechanisms for government to consult directly with young people and embed their voices in decision making process at the national level.

Localised MYAN-affiliated organisations are important vehicles of this work and are the only ones delivering this mix of activities with a specific focus on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This work is not being duplicated by other organisations and the states/territories have a particularly important role to play as a vehicle to facilitate contributions (both in policy and supporting youth engagement) at the federal level.. This work facilitates connections between settlement services and between mainstream and settlement services – working within the settlement sector (continuum between HSP and SETS, and with related programs e.g. AMEP) and beyond, in the social cohesion area.

However, the resourcing (and therefore activities and capacities) of each MYAN-affiliated organisation across Australia vary considerably. Only some states/territories receive specific funding for MYAN-related activities, with auspicing organisations providing 'in-kind' support for activities to support MYAN state/territory-based work.

### **Outcomes of funding**

Additional funding to support this existing infrastructure would increase the capacity of MYAN and our partner organisations to respond to the particular issues commonly experienced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia - some of which are highlighted in this submission. Investment in a national multicultural youth specialist approach - dedicated infrastructure at the state/territory level for MYAN activities - will improve economic, social and civic outcomes for young people and strengthen social cohesion. MYAN has built a structure through which the Commonwealth government can deliver policy advice and direct engagement with CALD young people but we need additional investment to strengthen this infrastructure. Specific outcomes include:

#### **For young people:**

- Improved social, economic and civic participation (e.g. successful education, training and employment transitions).
- They are more actively connected to the broader community, contributing to a strong, socially cohesive multicultural society.
- Increased participation in forums and decision making processes on the issues that impact them.
- Improved sense of belonging and inclusion (for young people, their families and communities).

**For the service system/sector:**

- Improved workforce capability - a more informed and skilled youth, multicultural and settlement sector to better support good practice and youth settlement outcomes (as per the National Youth Settlement Framework).
- Improved capacity to measure outcomes and contribute to a stronger evidence base
- A more coordinated service system:
  - Within/across the settlement services system
  - Between settlement, multicultural and mainstream services
- Increased responsiveness of mainstream services to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- Improved national consistency in youth settlement and social cohesion support.

**Funding**

MYAN has calculated a budget of \$2,000,000.00 for MYAN and our state/territory partners to deliver MYAN activities, dependent on need and population, including the specific needs of rural and regional Australia. Even though some states receive SETS funding, this request is for specific MYAN activities, including strengthening collaboration and coordination across the settlement service system and with mainstream services, and providing support to government to deliver the above in employment, education, social cohesion and mental health. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss this proposal in further detail.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide these proposals and recommendations for consideration. MYAN would be pleased to provide further information on any part of this submission.

Yours faithfully,



Rana Ebrahimi

MYAN National Manager